

**Original citation:**

Squire, Vicki. (2016) Governing migration through death in Europe and the US : identification, burial and the crisis of modern humanism. European Journal of International Relations.

**Permanent WRAP URL:**

<http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/83574>

**Copyright and reuse:**

The Warwick Research Archive Portal (WRAP) makes this work by researchers of the University of Warwick available open access under the following conditions. Copyright © and all moral rights to the version of the paper presented here belong to the individual author(s) and/or other copyright owners. To the extent reasonable and practicable the material made available in WRAP has been checked for eligibility before being made available.

Copies of full items can be used for personal research or study, educational, or not-for profit purposes without prior permission or charge. Provided that the authors, title and full bibliographic details are credited, a hyperlink and/or URL is given for the original metadata page and the content is not changed in any way.

**Publisher's statement:**

'The final, definitive version of this paper has been published in European Journal of International Relations, 2016 by SAGE Publications Ltd, All rights reserved. © The Author(s)  
Published version: <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1354066116668662>

**A note on versions:**

The version presented here may differ from the published version or, version of record, if you wish to cite this item you are advised to consult the publisher's version. Please see the 'permanent WRAP url' above for details on accessing the published version and note that access may require a subscription.

For more information, please contact the WRAP Team at: [wrap@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:wrap@warwick.ac.uk)

# **Governing migration through death in Europe and the US: Identification, burial and the crisis of modern humanism<sup>1</sup>**

## **Abstract**

Border deaths have become an established feature of contemporary migratory politics in both Europe and the US. This article examines similarities and differences in practices of 'governing migration through death' across the US-Mexico (Sonoran) and in the EU-North African (Mediterranean) contexts. Instead of taking a conventional comparative analysis of two distinct sites, the article draws on critical scholarship in the field of border studies in order to examine biopolitical, thanatopolitical and necropolitical dynamics of bordering that cross contexts. It argues that these operations of power converge in both European and US bordering practices, specifically through a form of biophysical violence that operates directly on the biological functions of migrating bodies. The article suggests that the establishment of this violence represents a crisis of modern humanism, which becomes implicated in the toleration of such violence through processes of denial, displacement, rejection and compensation. By focusing in particular on the ways that the treatment of the dead functions as a means of compensating for (yet not redressing) biophysical violence, the article highlights the deficiencies of contemporary practices of identification and burial, and raises questions about the limitations of contestations that emphasise dignity only to perpetuate a hierarchy of 'worthy' and 'unworthy' lives. In so doing, the article concludes by suggesting that contemporary 'migration crises' are better understood in terms of the crisis of modern humanism, grounded in Greco-Roman and Judaeo-Christian traditions, which can no longer deny its implication in practices of governing migration through death.

## **Key words**

Borders, violence, biopolitics, dignity, human rights

## Introduction

The violence of contemporary bordering practices is no more evident than in the growing number of border deaths across ‘deserts and seas’ over recent years. The past two decades have seen a dramatic rise in the number of such deaths in both the North American and in the European contexts, where bordering practices maintain the privileges associated with living in a relatively stable and developed region or state. The Sonoran Desert between Mexico and the US renders the crossing lethal for many. In the Southwest Section of the US border territory, a total of 240 border deaths were recorded in 2015. While this represents a slight reduction from previous years, it nevertheless continues a concerning pattern from the late-1990s, which saw a peak of 471 recorded deaths in 2012.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, border deaths increased significantly during the mid-2000s in the Mediterranean Sea between Europe and North Africa, with there being a temporary drop before another rise in the number of recorded deaths from 2011.<sup>3</sup> Particularly notable here are recent figures, with 3279 deaths recorded in 2014 and 3770 in 2015.<sup>4</sup> Rising numbers of border deaths are conceptualized in this article in terms of a form of *biophysical violence* whereby people are abandoned to the physical forces of deserts and seas, which directly operate on bodily functions with often devastating consequences (Squire, 2015a). As is evident in both the Sonoran and the Mediterranean contexts, biophysical violence and the deaths associated with this have become an established feature of contemporary border politics.

So, how can we make sense of the emergence of death as a routine or normalised dimension of contemporary bordering practices between more or less stable and privileged regions? Moreover, and most importantly, what possibilities exist for a transformation of the troubling situation whereby death becomes a norm through which migration is governed? Existing scholarship already provides important insight into the ways that border fatalities are conditioned by practices that ‘govern through death’. This includes scholarship that draws on Michel Foucault’s work on biopolitics (e.g. Rygiel, 2010; Topak, 2014), Giorgio Agamben’s work on sovereign power and bare life (e.g. Doty, 2011; Rygiel, 2010; Vaughan-Williams, 2012), and Achille Mbembe’s work on necropolitics (Estevez, 2014; De Leon, 2015). There is also an important body of work that explores the ways in which contestations over migrant deaths un- or re-make citizenship and political community (Rygiel, 2014, 2016) through practices of grieving (Stierl, 2016), mourning (Bieberstein and Evren, 2016; Délano Alonso and Nienass, 2016), burial (Balkan, 2015a, 2015b) and memorial (Zagaria, 2011), all of which reject exclusionary state practices associated with such deaths (Catania, 2015). This article contributes to these literatures by paying attention to the specificities as well as the affinities of contemporary bordering practices in contexts of relative stability and privilege. It highlights how biophysical violence emerges as a means through which different practices of ‘governing migration through death’ converge, while also assessing interventions that contest such violence through emphasizing the importance of human dignity.

A key aim of this article is to provide a comparative analysis of the conditions under which border deaths emerge across both the Sonoran Desert and the Mediterranean Sea. This is important, because it facilitates insight both into the convergences and contextualised mutations of contemporary bordering practices and mechanisms of dealing with border deaths. It also fosters understanding of the ways that biophysical violence is tolerated across contexts. That said, the analysis here does not purport to be comparative in the sense of

providing a comprehensive empirical analysis based on the delineation of two or more distinct (national or state-based) case studies. Rather, it emphasizes contextualised differences as well as affinities between contemporary practices of ‘governing migration through death’ in the US-Mexico Sonoran and EU-North African Mediterranean contexts. Indeed, it does so in terms that problematise the clear-cut distinction between the two. The article draws upon ethnographic research carried out over the past five years across each site.<sup>5</sup> It is on the basis of this research that the article focuses on contestations that are framed specifically in terms of concerns over human dignity. Dignity is a concept that is mobilised across both contexts, both in secular and religious debates, as well as in relation to interventions focused both on the dead and on the living. The analysis here seeks to provide an initial diagnosis of how the term is used across each context, based on a consideration of the critical political potential and limitations of existing interventions.

This article does not offer a comprehensive review of dignity as a concept, nor does it provide a full analysis of its mobilisation in each context. Rather, the article focuses on how dignity is entwined with dynamics of power and violence that condition the emergence of border deaths at each site, while also paying attention to how dignity features within a longer Greco-Roman and Judaeo-Christian conceptual tradition that conditions modern humanism. This analysis is important in addressing the question of what possibilities exist for a transformation of the troubling situation whereby death becomes a norm through which migration is governed, because it raises questions about interventions that rely on an uncritical use of dignity as a frame of intervention. This resonates with recent critiques of humanitarian discourse, which critical scholars argue does not adequately challenge the relations of power within which measures of border security are grounded (e.g. Pallister-Wilkins, 2014; Williams, 2015). This article argues that the establishment of biophysical violence represents a crisis of modern humanism, which becomes implicated in the toleration of such violence through processes of denial, displacement, rejection and compensation. It unpacks these processes in further detail, focusing further on the ways that the treatment of the dead functions as a means of compensating for, yet not redressing, biophysical violence. In particular, the article highlights the deficiencies of contemporary practices of identification and burial, and raises questions about the limitations of contestations that emphasise the importance of human dignity only to perpetuate a hierarchy of ‘worthy’ and ‘unworthy’ lives. In so doing, the article concludes by suggesting that contemporary ‘migration crises’ are better understood in terms of a crisis of modern humanism, which can no longer deny its implication in practices of governing migration through death.

### **Governing migration through death**

Existing scholarship already provides important insight into the ways that migrant deaths result from bordering practices that govern through death (De Leon, 2015; Doty, 2012). Much of this takes as a starting point Michel Foucault’s discussion of biopolitics (e.g. Rygiel, 2010; Topak, 2014; Vaughan-Williams, 2015a). For Foucault, biopolitics is a generalised form of governing, which involves a rationality or modality of power that manages or regulates populations through a series of calculative mechanisms that render life productive (Coleman and Grove, 2009). That is, biopolitics refers to a governmental regime whereby life becomes

an object of calculation, with knowledge-power therefore actively operating on life itself. There is in this sense a productive dynamic to biopolitics, because it involves governmental attempts to ensure life operates at an optimal level. Nevertheless, this maximizing dimension of biopolitics is not separable from its more destructive dimensions on forms of life that are not operating at 'optimal efficiency'. This is reflected in Foucault's conceptualisation of what he calls 'biopolitical racism'. Biopolitical racism is developed in the context of Foucault's discussion of a shift in power from the sovereign right to 'let live and make die' toward one that 'makes live and leaves to die'. This involves a biological dimension in the sense that biopolitical racism involves a form of rationality connected to the improvement of the human species through the creation of 'inferior race'. Biopolitical racism is marked by a separation of groups within a population, or by a subdivision of the regulated species (1997: 254-5). Rather than providing an essentialist conception of 'race', Foucault's work here points to the ways in which the separation of human life into its 'productive' and 'unproductive' elements is an operation of government or governing. This is important for theorising the destructive aspects of contemporary bordering practices, whereby large swathes of people are 'left to die' through processes of racialization that devalue some people over others.

It is not difficult to identify the significance of 'biopolitical racism' in both of the contexts on which this paper focuses. As noted above, increasing numbers of people on the move have faced death in remote sites over recent years both in the Sonoran Desert and the Mediterranean Sea. In the Sonoran context this is documented in Luis Alberto Urrera's (2004) book *The Devil's Highway*, which tells the story of twenty-six Mexican men who attempted the border crossing in 2001. Urrera describes how the men crossed an extremely deadly region of the border – a region which even Border Patrol would not cross. Only twelve survived the journey, with many left to die in the extreme desert heat. In the Mediterranean context the abandonment of people from sub-Saharan Africa in the has been exposed as highly contentious, most notably in the notorious 'left-to-die' boat case in 2011 (Council of Europe, 2012; see also Pezzani and Heller, 2013). This case was examined in detail by the the Forensic Oceanography project as a means to hold to account NATO states patrolling in the region. The investigation prompted a legal challenge on the basis of evidence showing that the boat in distress was seen but not responded to by various authorities.<sup>6</sup> There are complexities to this case, and while neither Europe nor the US *always* leaves migrants to die, policy developments have nevertheless led to dynamics of abandonment increasing over recent years (see Cuttitta, 2016). The processes of racialization that condition border deaths differ in each of these contexts, with those abandoned primarily being Mexicans in the Sonoran context and sub-Saharan Africans in the Mediterranean. Yet also notable here is that the biopolitical technique of 'letting die' is operational in both contexts, with border deaths through abandonment or desertion indicative of a mode of governing that involves a disregard for lives deemed to be 'not worth living' (Squire, 2015b).

Although the biopolitical drive to 'let die' is not presented as the direct result of bordering practices in either context, processes of abandonment have increasingly been addressed much more explicitly as a systemic or general (if not willful) dimension of contemporary practices of governing migration (Heller and Pezzani, 2012; see also Povinelli, 2014). This is significant because it draws attention to what Nick Vaughan-Williams (2015a) refers to as the potential for a lethal 'drift' toward 'thanatopolitical borders'. The 'thanatopolitical border' is a term developed from Giorgio Agamben's conceptualisation of the way in which exposure to

death is integral to sovereign-biopolitics. Agamben's work is not focused on 'biopolitical racism' directly, but rather explores the ways in which some lives are devoid of their political agency through their production as 'bare life'. Agamben notoriously rejects Foucault's distinction between the sovereign drive to make die and the biopolitical drive to let die. His theorisation of *homo sacer* or bare life as representing life that can be killed but not sacrificed points to the destructive tendencies of a biopolitics that does not simply 'make live', but that also creates the conditions under which lethal power operates through 'the ban' (Agamben, 1998, 2005). Agamben thus offers what Vaughan-Williams refers to as a means to appreciate the 'thanatopolitical potential and lethal material workings of the sovereign ban' (2015a: 67). This reflects what I call here a process of 'governing migration through death' which is no more evident than in the abandonment of people across 'desert and seas' in the Sonoran and Mediterranean contexts.

Agamben's conceptual framework is problematic for the analysis of migration struggles (see McNevin, 2013; Squire 2011), but his work has nevertheless provided scholars a means by which to conceptualise border deaths as an operation of power that involves a particular way of killing those lives that are not deemed worthy of being sacrificed (see Squire, 2015b). In this sense both Agamben and Foucault have been important for scholars seeking to understand how deaths that might be presented as a 'tragic accident' are better understood as an integral operation of power (see Vaughan-Williams, 2015a: 47). It is my contention that Foucault's focus on multiple rationalities of power and his embedding of resistance as integral to understanding power is particularly helpful here. This is because such an approach provides the conceptual tools by which to further understand how border deaths as effects of the operation of power are political, rather than natural or accidental, and are resisted in practice. Drawing on such an insight, this article draws out multiple and overlapping operations of power in their concrete instantiation, focusing both on mechanisms of power through which migration is 'governed through death' as well as on the ways in which these are contested or challenged. By examining how such dynamics – biopolitical, thanatopolitical and necropolitical – emerge across different contexts, this article therefore develops a critical analysis that interrogates the dynamics and ambivalence of existing practices and their effects (cf. McNevin, 2013, Squire, 2015a, 2015b). By focusing on the biophysical violence that is embedded within such practices, the analysis draws attention to resonances between different rationalities of power in terms of processes of 'governing migration through death', while also extending Foucault's analysis to explore how what appear to be 'natural' forces play into the biological processes that leave racialized others to die within a regulatory framework of governing life.

Consideration of the Sonoran case is particularly interesting in developing an understanding of how migration is 'governed through death', because the lethal 'thanatopolitical drift' associated with a biopolitical drive to 'let die' most clearly informs policy in this case. While migrant deaths are not directly accepted by the US federal government as a result of bordering practices, the development of policy in this area relies on explicit reference to the significance of the hostile desert terrain in controlling border crossings. In 1993, Operation Blockade in El Paso, saw the beginning of a shift away from the traditional strategy of apprehending undocumented migrants toward policies of deterrence. Timothy Dunn describes the operation in terms of 'some four hundred agents directly on the banks of the Rio Grande in a high-visibility fashion to deter unauthorised (or illegal) border crossings'

(2010: 1). He also describes how officials acknowledged that this would lead to crossers being diverted to 'more hostile terrain' (cited in Dunn, 2010: 2), with the desert being mobilized directly for the purposes of border control. This approach also informed the 1994 southwest strategy, which aimed to make it so difficult to cross borders illegally that fewer migrants would attempt the crossing (Nevins 2010; Sundberg, 2008). Although migrant deaths are not explicitly referred to in discussions of policy formation in the US, policy development is nevertheless directly grounded in an appreciation of the risks posed to people crossing 'hostile terrain'. It is in this context that Roxanne Lynn Doty (2011) has criticised the way in which the desert serves as a 'moral alibi' for policy makers who elide responsibility for the violence associated with bordering practices by reference to 'natural causes' of death (see also Squire, 2014, 2015a). This a clear example of how biophysical violence – a form of violence that operates directly on the biological functions of moving bodies through forces of 'nature' – is distinctive yet connected to state violence of a more direct nature, as well as to forms of 'structural violence' of a cultural and institutionalized form (see Galtung, 1969)

De Leon goes further than Doty to suggest that the way the harsh environment can 'erase evidence' reflects a purposeful strategy of governing migration through death on the part of the US federal government (2015: 4). The discussion of biophysical violence developed in this article lies in contrast to an approach that attributes full intentionality for border deaths, while at the same time as pointing to the importance of engaging and extended conception of response-ability in such a context (Squire, 2015a). This is not to detract from the importance of Doty and De Leon's arguments in the context of US policy, but rather it is to explore how this form of violence also has unintentional dimensions that need to be rendered visible precisely in order to foster an expanded responsibility for such deaths. This is important when it comes to European policy developments, which were in part articulated in the summer/autumn of 2015 as attempting to respond to what appears as an 'unexpected' increase in migrant deaths. Despite of a long history of migration across the Mediterranean (Cantat, 2015), a history of several decades of migrant deaths in the Mediterranean region, and in spite of the Mediterranean Sea being one of the most heavily trafficked and heavily surveilled waters in the world, cases such as the death of over 800 migrants on April 18 2015 along with subsequent tragedies appear to have taken Europe by surprise. This may in part reflect the vast quantitative difference numbers of people who die crossing the Mediterranean Sea (at least 3770 in 2015) compared to those crossing the Sonoran Desert (240 in 2015). However, it may also reflect something specific to the ways in which biophysical violence operates in each context. Certainly, evidence is erased in both contexts, with bodies disappearing in the desert and sea in distinct ways. Yet erasure can also *fail*. Indeed, the way in which bodies degrade and reemerge from the sea is particularly shocking and often disruptive in the European context. Bodies bloat through deaths at sea, often reemerging on local and tourist beaches in the Mediterranean to the shock of European publics. In contrast, deserted remains in the Sonoran context rarely reemerge without mediation, and thus US publics have limited exposure to bones and hair that emerge from the desert. It is in this regard more difficult in many senses for Europe to explicitly mobilise 'natural' forces as a mechanism of governing migration, compared to the US case.

Despite these differences in the operation and effects of biophysical violence in each context, there is another important similarity in the dynamics across the Sonoran and Mediterranean regions. This relates to what scholars have called the 'necropolitical' dimensions of 'governing

migration through death', which can be understood in terms of a maintenance of the stability and privileges of one state or region over another. It is in the latter sense that Achille Mbembe's (2003) discussion of the shift from biopolitics to a new paradigm in which life is subjugated to the 'power of death' is significant. For Mbembe, Foucault's emphasis on disciplinary and biopolitical power is insufficient in capturing the directly physical (tactile and sensorial) effects of power, which involve a destructive dimension that is grounded in the sovereign's capacity to dictate who may live and who may die. This is important in terms similar to the sense that has been suggested of Agamban's work for scholars of migration, because it focuses attention on the biopolitical regulation of death, not simply of life (Estevez, 2014: 77). More to the point, Mbembe's emphasis on 'necropolitics' involves the delineation of which lives are 'disposable' and which are not (cf De Leon, 2015), with sovereign-biopower operating in necropolitical terms through taking on a distinctly colonial dimension whereby 'entire populations' become the focus of destruction and akin to the 'living dead' (2013: 27-30). Translated in relation to the analysis of migrant deaths, necropolitics has been an important tool for scholars of the 'periphery' in conceptualising conditions of hopelessness under which migration occurs (Estevez, 2014: 77). This resonates with analyses of the dehumanisation of migrants, reflected recently in Nick Vaughan-Williams' (2015b) discussion of 'zoopolitical' borders, whereby those subject to border control are treated 'as animals'. Importantly, an analysis of the necropolitical can thus further our understanding of how biopolitics in contexts marked by a struggle to maintain stability and privilege also entail destructive dimensions that render people a choice between remaining under the threat of death as disposable lives, or leaving through terrains in which they face the risk of death through being left to die. A necropolitical analysis can thus also provide a backdrop by which to understand how acts of 'migratory escape' or 'desertion' can be politically disruptive of necropolitics, albeit in terms that are ambiguous in their challenge to practices of 'governing migration through death' (Squire, 2015b).

## **Biophysical violence**

As we have seen, recent scholarship provides important insights into how migrant fatalities are conditioned by bordering practices that 'govern through death'. Such works highlight multiple and overlapping operations of power as conceptualized in relation to biopolitics, thanatopolitics, necropolitics and zoopolitics. Nevertheless, each of the conceptual approaches discussed so far has dangers if employed as an overarching conceptual framework by which to analyse concrete bordering practices or migratory experiences. Critical from the perspective developed here is that attention is paid to the multiplicity and ambivalence of power dynamics within contemporary border politics (McNevin, 2012). This also means paying further attention to how such destructive relations and practices fail, breakdown, and are inhabited, undermined or even potentially overthrown by different resistances or contestatory and subversive practices (cf. Squire, 2011, 2015b). Such an emphasis helps to shed light on the way in which migration is 'governed through death' across diverse contexts, without running the risk of reifying either the destructive or the productive tendencies of contemporary border struggles (Vaughan-Williams, 2015a; see also Squire, 2011).



That said, before undertaking an analysis of contestations of bordering practices that govern migration through death, I want to pay further attention to the ways in which the different dynamics or operations of power discussed above converge in both the European and US contexts through a form of biophysical violence that is integral to practices of governing migration through death, and which operate directly on the biological functions of migrating bodies (see also Squire, 2014, 2015a). As we have seen, biophysical violence enrolls various 'natural' or physical elements within its operation, and while not reducible to the operations of power discussed above nevertheless implicates them in a way that highlights the blurred distinction between killing and letting die. Such violence is evident both in the Sonoran Desert and in the Mediterranean Sea. In Sonora, the reasons for people's death are variable and include, for instance, cases whereby people suffer blows to the head. Nevertheless, exposure is the most commonly recorded cause of death. This highlights the extremes of temperature that people face when crossing the desert, with temperatures rising up to around 50 degrees Celsius in the daytime and dropping below freezing at night. People typically spend around five days or so travelling by foot through the harsh desert terrain, often in groups led by *coyote* (a paid guide). They follow paths under conditions that are extremely challenging physically, and that demand a high level of fitness. People often run out of water *en route*, and can quickly deteriorate in strength if they fall ill along the way. When this happens, it is not uncommon for people to be left behind because they cannot keep pace with the main group. In such cases it is unusual for someone to leave the desert alive, though they can sometimes be rescued by border patrol, which has a small humanitarian section called BORSTAR (Williams, 2015).

In the European context, the majority of migrants die crossing the Mediterranean Sea, as already indicated. It has become common over recent years for people to travel packed into rubber dinghies without anybody to navigate their passage. People travel this way across both the central and eastern Mediterranean routes. The central route to Italy, which became heavily travelled following the 'Arab Spring' of 2011, currently involves many departures from Libya, as well as sometimes from Egypt, and occasionally from Tunisia. This is the deadliest route to date, partly due to its length, with the stretch of sea between Libya (Tripoli) and Italy (Sicily) over 300 miles in total. In 2015, the eastern Mediterranean route via the Aegean Sea became increasingly significant, particularly in light of the mass exodus of Syrians via Turkey. This was reflected in the increase of migrant deaths on that route in 2015 and at the beginning of 2016.<sup>7</sup> The stretch of sea from Turkey to Greece is much shorter than it is along the central route. Indeed, as discussed in the previous section, it is not unusual for the bodies of dead migrants to wash ashore in this region, as with the widely-publicised case of the toddler Aylan Kurdi in September 2015.<sup>8</sup> The numbers of migrant deaths in the European context are estimations, which draw not only on the number of bodies recovered but on a range of data, including numbers calculated to have been lost from rescued boats. Despite a large number of deaths being recorded across the Mediterranean, it is therefore inevitable that many people die without their bodies being recovered, particularly on the longer central route (Albahari, 2016). Elements such as remoteness, weather, and daylight all play into the recovery of people and bodies in this context, indicative of the ways that biophysical violence not only involves geographical entities but also a wider range of physical processes and elements that work directly on the material functioning of bodies on the move.

What emerges from this analysis is a perspective on the Sonoran and Mediterranean contexts that are marked more by a quantitative difference (in terms of the numbers of migrant deaths) than a qualitative difference (notwithstanding those noted in the last section). Indeed, there are broader dynamics in both contexts that resonate with one another: the intensification and militarization of border security (Cuttitta, 2016; Muller, 2012); increasing population surveillance (Bigo, 2005); the growing institutionalisation of detention and deportation (Anderson et al, 2011); the externalization of border controls to transit of sending states (Bialasiewicz, 2012; Coleman, 2007); and the coupling of humanitarianism with border security (Cuttitta, 2016; Pallister-Wilkins, 2015; Vaughan-Williams, 2016; Williams, 2015). Indeed, these dimensions converge as part of a preventive and deterrent approach that blur the distinction between a biopolitical drive to 'let die', a lethal thanatopolitical 'drift' that kills, as well as necropolitical conditions that drive flight from a 'living death' and the danger of being a 'disposable life'. It is the suggestion of this article that these come together through a form of biophysical violence that is manifest in both the European and US contexts. The article suggests that the convergence of multiple operations of power is *not* evidence of the all-embracing nature of its destructive tendencies, but rather of its widespread toleration.<sup>9</sup> This toleration not only involves processes of denial, such as in the engagement of natural forces as a 'moral alibi' by which to *evade* the state's culpability in migrant deaths (Doty, 2012). It also involves processes of *displacement* through search and rescue mechanisms, whereby culpability is passed over to the migrant based on his or her inability to recognize the dangers of the natural environment. Moreover, the toleration of the biophysical violence of governing migration through death involves a *rejection* of culpability through anti-smuggling measures and returns, which blame criminal networks if not migrants themselves for their death. The toleration of biophysical violence, in other words, itself takes multiple forms.

### **Tolerating biophysical violence**

This article focuses in particular on the way in which the toleration of violence occurs through compensatory measures oriented to the treatment of the dead. This focus is not only a result of the limitations of space, but also because of the significance of compensatory measures in relation to interventions that contest border deaths specifically through appeals to human dignity. Roxanne Lynn Doty's work is particularly important in showing how toleration occurs through processes of denial that involve the state's evasion of culpability for border deaths (Doty, 2012). Yet as indicated above, biophysical violence goes even further in highlighting the *non-intentional* drivers of border deaths – *not* to detract from the culpability of practices of governing through death, but in order to emphasise the importance of engaging an extended conception of response-ability through an analysis that recognizes the ways in which such deaths are often tolerated without conscious appreciation of the ways in which practices of governing feature in these. Toleration of border deaths does not only involve a denial of culpability through the identification of deaths as a product of 'natural' forces. It also involves the shifting or *displacement* of responsibility onto the person at risk of death. In a context of increased border deaths, this occurs through a process of victimization embedded in humanitarian operations, such as search and rescue which has become integral to governing migration in the Mediterranean context (see also Pallister-Wilkins, 2014). Here, culpability is not simply denied, but rather the rescuer enacts responsibility while passing on irresponsibility to the victim. Notably, the victim is not a victim of necropolitics, biopolitics

and biophysical violence – rather he or she becomes a victim of his or her own inability to recognize the dangers of the ‘natural’ environment. Nevertheless, it is difficult to apportion culpability for mass border deaths to victims alone, and in the European context there is a further rejection of culpability through an emphasis on tackling criminal smuggling networks. A similar focus on anti-smuggling measures is evident in the US context, where the governing of migration has been much more closely tied to measures against drug and other forms of smuggling. Notably, European police forces are increasingly paying attention to the multiple forms of smuggling as part of the attempt to address networks facilitating the unauthorised movement of people (Europol-Interpol, 2016). The toleration of biophysical violence thus takes multiple forms, and involves the denial, displacement *and* rejection of culpability, as well as compensatory measures through mechanisms of dealing with border deaths, as the article will now flesh out in further detail.

In her analysis of the transgression of state-based citizenship through mobilisations around those ‘dying to live’, Kim Rygiel (2016) emphasizes the ways in which dead migrants paradoxically often ‘count’ in ways that people on the move without documentation do not. Similarly, Alexandra Délano Alonso and Benjamin Nienass (2016) point to the ways in which ‘material bodies’ only become an acknowledged presence in death. Rygiel in particular draws attention to state practices of accounting for migrant bodies, which provide a form of legal status and involve interventions in terms that privilege the dead over the living. Though this dynamic is not the case in all senses – for example, living migrants are often fingerprinted while DNA samples from the dead are not taken (Zagaria, 2011) – Rygiel here raises an important insight in terms of citizenship. A particularly prominent case in this regard occurred in 2013, when Italy proposed awarding posthumous citizenship to those who had died at sea (see also Albahari, 2016). The shipwreck occurred on 3 October 2013, when at least 366 migrants died when their boat capsized off the coast of Lampedusa. This was the subject of significant controversy, given that the rights associated with citizenship were not extended to surviving migrants, who were expelled on the grounds of illegal entrance (de Haas, 2013). While citizenship was not eventually granted to the dead, Italy nevertheless held a day of mourning following the tragedy, and regular memorials are attended by state officials in Lampedusa on 3 October each year (see also Squire, 2016). In this article, I argue that such a case can be understood as a form of tolerating biophysical violence by *compensatory* means. The limitations of these compensatory mechanisms can be further considered through a more detailed analysis of identification and burial practices in both the US and Europe.

The Tucson US Border Patrol sector is a 262-mile long section of the border region which crosses the Sonoran Desert. The Pima County Medical Officer in Arizona holds responsibility for dealing with bodies recovered from the region. Here, bodies recovered from across the Sonoran Desert can be held awaiting identification for long periods of time, with significant efforts made to identify the dead through detailed physical analysis. Like Rygiel suggests, bodies are ‘counted’ here in a way that undocumented migrants are not when they are alive. Indeed, a notable feature of the US case is the relatively thorough and sustained effort to identify the dead. That said, if a body is not identified it is subsequently subject to burial in terms that mark it out from US citizens, or at least from ‘worthy’ US citizens. Unidentified migrants are buried with those who are not able to pay for their own funerals privately, such as in the indigent section of the Evergreen Cemetery in Arizona. In the early 2000s these graves were marked John Doe – or Juan Doe – meaning unidentified, though graves began to

be left unmarked from 2004 in order to save money (see McDaniel, 2010b). Similar attempts to save money (and space) are evident in moves to cremate the bodies of migrants rather than bury them (Délano Alonso and Nienass, 2016) – again, marking out unidentified migrants from US citizens on their death. Such efforts to save money has been described as a dilemma between respect for the dead and pointless expenditure by an undertaker responsible for indigent burials in Arizona. If someone loses their life, he is quoted as saying: ‘we still need to maintain their dignity’. He continues: ‘gosh, they need to be respected, but by the same token, it would save us some money not to engrave the John Does – and for what?’ (cited in McDaniel, 2010b). The lives of undocumented migrants, echoing Judith Butler, are thus less grievable than the lives of US citizens (cf. Butler, 2003, 2009).

It is worth noting that processes of burial are differentiated in the US context. Despite care being taken in identifying the dead in the circumstances noted above, controversy has arisen over recent years where unidentified migrants have been buried by private funeral homes in mass graves without proper identification procedures (see also Délano Alonso and Nienass, 2016). For example, in June 2014 archaeologists discovered a site in Southern Texas where multiple bodies were buried within the same body bags. Moreover, some bodies in the mass grave were not even contained within body bags. This was described by some as a crime scene, and led to calls for DNA testing of all recovered bodies. A local lawmaker Rep. Terry Canales was reported as stating that ‘...we need to send a message to the world that in our state, we do not stain the honour of loved ones who have passed away’ (cited in Bever, 2014). Although there is evidence of sustained efforts to identify migrants who have died *en route* to the US, this is therefore not a practice that happens in all cases. Moreover, those who remain anonymous are often marked out in death on the basis of burial practices that separate the worthy from the unworthy. This is indicative of processes of dehumanisation or what was earlier referred to as a zoopolitical operation of power (Vaughan-Williams, 2015).

So how do identification and burial practices in Europe compare with those in the US? Official identification procedures in Europe are generally less protracted than in the case of the Pima County Medical Officer discussed above. This is particularly the case in contexts whereby local service providers are unprepared to deal with a sudden increase of bodies. For example, in 2016 a man from Huddersfield was interviewed by Channel 4 for his voluntary efforts to bury the dead in the Greek island of Lesbos. He was described as feeling ‘compelled to give those who died on the journey a proper Muslim funeral’, and the clip involves images of improvised graves while the interviewee describes the anonymity of those who are buried.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, in their authoritative study of burial and identification in Lesbos, Kovras and Robins (2016) show the failures of authorities to identify the bodies and the speed with which bodies are buried in terms that work against their future identification. The identification of the deceased varies across different sites, but usually includes broad reference to the age and the region that a person originates from, and does not involve DNA identification procedures (Zagaria, 2011; Kovras and Robins, 2016).

Unidentified migrants are sometimes buried in graves alongside European citizens. For example, in the cemetery in the Mediterranean island of Lampedusa plaques provide information about the likely age and region of origin of the deceased, as well as the place and date of death. Here, migrants are not distanced from Italian citizens but there is a marked difference between migrant graves, not least with migrants in multiple rather than individual

graves. As in the US, there is thus a differentiation between the worthy and unworthy in death in the European context. This points to the limitations of identification and burial practices, which further tolerate biophysical violence through compensatory mechanisms that not only fail to acknowledge the ways in which migrant deaths are conditioned through governing practices, but that also perpetuate exclusionary practices in death. That private individuals and other groups are involved in this process is suggestive both of the ways in which humanitarian efforts can be complicit in 'governing migration through death', as well as to the ways in which the treatment of dead bodies opens an ambivalent space for the contestation of biophysical violence.

### **Dignity in death?**

Beyond emphasizing the ways in which migrants count more in death than in life, Rygiel also provides an analysis of different practices through which migrant deaths are contested. She thus contributes to a growing body of scholarship that examines the politics of migrant deaths in terms of the relation between regulatory practices and practices of contestation or resistance. Such works include analyses of burial as a form of 'necropatriotism' that fixes ambivalent identities (Balkan, 2015), analyses of religious ceremonies that 'people the state' through mourning migrant deaths (Cantini, 2015), analyses of grieving practices that constitute a solidaristic 'resource of politics' in protesting necropolitical violence (Stierl, 2016), memorial practices that disrupt the anonymity of unidentified burials (Zagaria, 2011) and 'improper' politics of mourning that tends to dead strangers (Bieberstein and Evren, 2016). As Alexandra Délano Alonso and Benjamin Nienass (2016) suggest in their analysis of mourning practices in the US, mourning can enact not only a closure and depoliticisation, but also a moment of disruption that repoliticise migrant deaths. Such analyses are important in addressing migrant deaths not simply through a humanitarian lens (Robins et al, 2014), but also with reference to relations of power, violence, resistance and contestation. By exploring contestations of the compensatory identification and burial practices through which biophysical violence is tolerated and further perpetuated, this article seeks to contribute to scholarship that takes death as a site of political struggle.

There are various ways through which migrant deaths emerge as a site of political struggle. For example, groups such as No More Deaths in the US and Watch the Mediterranean Sea (WatchTheMed) monitor migrant deaths, which can often be overlooked because of the limitations of public scrutiny across deserts and seas. In addition, humanitarian groups highlight the need for proper identification procedures. This is seen as particularly important in order that the family members of those who have died can be informed of the plight of their missing (Robins et al, 2014, 2015; Kovras and Robins, 2016). There are also contestations over the ways in which migrants and citizens are differentiated in death through burial practices (see Bieberstein and Evren, 2016; Délano Alonso and Nienass, 2016; Zagaria, 2011). One example here is where the religious organisation called Mediterranean Hope has made efforts to identify the unidentified in order to provide graves that do not mark buried migrants out as separate from Italian citizens in the way represented in the image above. A person from the group in Lampedusa who I interviewed described how this enables people to experience 'dignity in death'.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, this theme of dignity in death is one that has been picked up by the Catholic Church in particular. Pope Francis described the deaths of 3 October

2013 as a 'disgrace', having earlier condemned the 'global indifference' to the plight of those migrating.<sup>12</sup> In January 2016 he described Europe as a 'beacon' of the principles of equality and dignity that are 'inherent in human nature', and appealed for anti-smuggling measures to protect 'victims of human callousness and harsh weather'.<sup>13</sup> R. Tina Catania argues that Pope Francis here 'people's the state' by highlighting the 'God-given dignity' of those otherwise exploited by Europe's exploitative labour and border security practices (2015: 485).

While there a much broader range of contestations of migrant deaths than I have mapped here (e.g. see Bieberstein and Evren, 2016; Délano Alonso and Nienass, 2016; Stierl, 2016), I want to focus further on the potential and limitations of those that engage dignity as a frame of intervention. As the analysis thus far has suggested, 'dignity' is a concept that is evident in the US as well as in Europe. The concept is of particular importance in relation to what I have called 'governing migration through death' and biophysical violence, but can also be mobilised in terms that emphasise the importance of respecting the lives of the living. Thus, it is integral to human rights as well as humanitarian legal frameworks and is engaged in relation to a wide range of issues related to the right to life and the respect of all lives (see Rosen, 2012). This part of the paper briefly unpacks the concept of 'human dignity', not with the aim of providing a full conceptual history of the idea of dignity but rather to identify elements of significance for debates and practices surrounding migrant deaths at the current juncture. In so doing, it draws attention to problems integral to the concept of 'human dignity', while also pointing to the significance of the concept as part of a humanist approach that speaks to broader themes about the what it means to 'be human' and about the relationship between 'humanity' and 'nature'.

Human dignity as a concept is closely linked to contemporary discussions of human rights, and serves as a foundation for a range of important legal and constitutional texts. For example, human dignity is integral to the 1945 United Nations Charter and to the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Article 1 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights begins by stating: 'All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights' (cited in Rosen, 2012: 2). Similarly, Article 1 of Germany's Grundgesetz (Basic Law) states: 'Human dignity is inviolable' (cited in McCrudden, 2008). In addition, the term is integral to the development of humanitarian law and to the development of various constitutional legal frameworks during the Twentieth Century. For example, the International Committee of the Red Cross preamble to the Geneva Conventions claims that '...respect for the personality and dignity of human beings constitutes a universal principle which is binding even in the absence of any contractual undertaking' (Ibid). Important here is that human dignity refers to a way of respecting human life, enabling each human being to flourish under the protection of a legal framework. On this basis, it is clear why human dignity becomes an important means by which to address migrant deaths in terms that build on existing humanitarian and human rights frameworks seeking to maximise life.

Nevertheless, scholars interrogating human dignity also point to the concept's longer historical trajectory, prior to it becoming embedded within international and national law during the Twentieth Century. There are competing conceptions of the term here, which go back as far as to classical Roman thought. On the one hand, *dignitas hominis* forms a ground for dignity that refers to a status limited to those of reputation and with particular privileges. Usually it referred to those in public office, but it could also apply to institutions rather than

humans alone (McCrudden, 2008, p.657). On the other hand, human dignity was also used in a broader sense to refer to the human in contrast to animals. Cicero is a key figure that exemplifies this rather scattered use of the term. He writes: 'remember always how vastly superior is man's nature to that of cattle and other animals, their only thought is for bodily satisfactions... Man's mind, on the contrary, is developed by study and reflection... From this we may learn that sensual pleasure is wholly unworthy of the dignity of the human race' (Cicero *De Officiis*, cited in McCrudden, 2008, p.657). What is important to note here for our purposes is that dignity is a concept that has been embedded on the one hand hierarchies between humans involving claims to status and superiority of some men [sic] over others, and on the other hand a hierarchy that unites humans in their superiority over animals. Human dignity in Roman thought thus functions as a means to differentiate the worthy from the unworthy, the superior from the inferior. A similar tendency is evident in the Judaeo-Christian tradition.

Cicero's conception of the human as marked by dignity is one that has carried through the ages. For example, it can be found in the Middle Ages where 'humanists sought to reconcile classical thought with a dogmatic theology by emphasising the idea of mankind as having dignity because Man is made in the image of God' (McCrudden, 2008, p.658). The Greco-Roman concept of human dignity here combines a form of humanism with Judaeo-Christian ideas about the creation of man in the image of God. This can be viewed along at least two lines, which resonate strongly with one another but that deal with death and life respectively. The first of these follows the division of man from animals, evident in Grotius' discussion of the proper way of dealing with human death, where he states that even enemies in warfare retain the 'rights and nature of men' and cannot be denied a proper burial (cited in McCrudden, 2008, pp.658-9). The second line of thinking is not wholly distinct from this, but is particularly important as a forerunner for a focus on autonomous individuals within a humanist Enlightenment tradition. Here, Pico della Mirandola's (1486) the *Oration of the Dignity of Man* describes how God sets man on earth and proclaims his free choice:

We have given you, O Adam, no visage proper to yourself, nor endowment properly your own, in order that whatever place, whatever form, whatever gifts you may, with premeditation, select, these same you may have and possess through your own judgement and decision. The nature of all other creatures is defined and restricted within laws which We have laid down; you, by contrast, impeded by no such restrictions, may, by your own free will, to whose custody We have assigned you, trace for yourself the lineaments of your own nature. I have placed you at the very center of the world, so that from that vantage point you may with greater ease glance round about you on all that the world contains. We have made you a creature neither of heaven nor of earth, neither mortal nor immortal, in order that you may, as the free and proud shaper of your own being, fashion yourself in the form you may prefer. It will be in your power to descend to the lower, brutish forms of life; you will be able, through your own decision, to rise again to the superior orders whose life is divine.

What is clear here is that human dignity is again conceived of in terms of a hierarchy between superior and inferior lives. Indeed, there is a clear trajectory within a Greco-Roman and Judaeo-Christian tradition from human dignity as related to the notion of man is seen as being made in the image of God with the capacity for reason and mastery over himself and thus

nature, through to the Enlightenment conception of human autonomy embodied in Immanuel Kant's work. Kant's *Metaphysics of Morals* is key here, defining dignity in terms of the treatment of people as ends not as means, thus paying attention to the autonomy of individuals (McCruddan, 2008, p.670). Whether in life or in death, modern humanism here rests on a Greco-Roman and Judaeo-Christian tradition of thought that involves respect for the dignity of human life, yet in terms that rest on the assumption that some lives are superior to others.

A brief review of 'human dignity' as a concept and set of legal practices raises significant questions about the critical potential of the term's engagement as a means to transform a troubling situation whereby death becomes a norm through which migration is governed. Far from a category that contests or undermines biopolitical tendencies toward 'governing migration through death', human dignity might better be understood as a concept and set of practices that precisely embeds the divisions between worth and unworthy lives, superior and inferior lives, which biophysical violence thrives upon. Indeed, it is also a concept that builds into it a biopolitical drive towards maximising life while providing dignity in death. Nevertheless, what is also evident in a review of 'human dignity' as a concept is that it embodies various strands, tensions and nuances. Human dignity refers to a status of privilege involving the supremacy of some lives over others, yet it also challenges such hierarchies with reference to the importance of individual autonomy. It has also been integral to Twentieth Century debates about the universalism of human rights. Indeed, tensions between the hierarchical and egalitarian dimensions of the concept are manifest within the Catholic tradition in particular, where 'human dignity' was initially a distinctly hierarchical or anti-egalitarian concept and was later revised as an egalitarian concept as evident in its use by Pope Francis today (Rosen, 2012: 51-3). For these reasons, interventions that engage dignity as a means of critique are of particular interest, despite the evidence that a turn to 'human dignity' does not straightforwardly lead to a positive transformation of contemporary biopolitical practices of governing migration through death. Dignity beyond the Greco-Roman and Judaeo-Christian tradition is an important area of analysis in this regard.

## Conclusion

This article has tried to make sense of the emergence of migrant deaths as a routine or normalised dimension of contemporary bordering practices between more and less stable and privileged parts of the world. It has done so by providing a comparative lens on the US and European contexts. The article has drawn attention to the biopolitical, thanatopolitical, and necropolitical dimensions of contemporary border practices as these operate across the Sonoran Desert and Mediterranean Sea, pointing both to the subtle differences between these as well as the similarities that exist across contexts. In examining practices of identifying and burying the dead, it has shown how the US often invests more heavily than Europe in practices of identification, but that in Europe the burial of migrants has sometimes taken on greater symbolic significance. In both cases, however, it has been suggested that migrants paradoxically count more in death than in life. Indeed, the article has argued that far from contesting the biophysical violence through which various operations of power converge, practices of identification and burial in fact tolerate such violence through compensatory



measures that are of limited effect in transforming a troubling situation whereby death becomes a norm through which migration is governed.

The paper has located itself within a field of scholarship that pays attention to the ways in which practices of identifying and burying the bodies of dead migrants involves power and violence, as well as practices of resistance or contestation. Focusing specifically on the mobilisation of 'human dignity' in the European and US contexts, the paper has indicated that there are significant limitations in approaches that are informed by a modern humanist tradition that seeks to provide 'dignity in death' or that seeks to maximize life on the basis of legal frameworks designed to protect the autonomy of individuals. It has suggested that such approaches risk overlooking the hierarchies that the concept of dignity involves in the Greco-Roman and Judaeo-Christian tradition. Going further, the article has suggested that such approaches fail to address the inequalities and violence that are implicated in the very constitution of 'humans' who are deemed to be worthy of dignity. In reflecting on what possibilities exist for a transformation of the troubling situation whereby death becomes a norm through which migration is governed, the paper therefore indicates that the concept of human dignity as it is manifest in these cases does not provide any simple route out of a situation characterised by a form of biophysical violence that acts on the biological functioning of migrating bodies. Going further, the analysis suggests that such violence may even be integral to the formation of 'dignity' in its modern humanist formation as a norm to be upheld. This raises a critical question: instead of a crisis of border control or of humanitarianism, is the contemporary migration crisis better understood as a crisis of modern humanism, which can no longer deny its implication in practices of governing migration through death? And if so, how can dignity be mobilized differently?

## Bibliography

Agamben G. (1998) *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Agamben G. (2005) *State of Exception*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Albahari M. (forthcoming 2016) After the shipwreck: Mourning and citizenship in the Mediterranean, Our Sea. *Social Research, Special Issue: Borders and the Politics of Mourning*. Summer 2016.

Anderson B et al (2011) Boundaries of belonging: Deportation and the constitution and contestation of citizenship. *Citizenship Studies* 15:5, 435-45.

Balkan O. (2015a) Burial and belonging. *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*. 15(1): 20-34

Balkan O. (2015b) Until Death Do Us Depart: The Necropolitical Work of Turkish Funeral Funds in Germany. In Yasir Suleiman (Ed.) *Muslims in the UK and Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 19–28.

Bialasiewicz L. (2012) Off-shoring and Out-sourcing the Borders of EUrope: Libya and EU border work in the Mediterranean. *Geopolitics*, 17(4), 843-866.

Bieberstein A. and Evren E. (2016) From Aggressive Humanism to Improper Mourning: Burying the victims of Europe's border regime in Berlin. *Social Research, Special Issue: Borders and the Politics of Mourning*. Summer 2016.

Bigo D. (2015) Globalised-in-security: The field and the ban-opticon. In J. Solomon and N. Sakai (eds) *Translation, Philosophy and Colonial Difference*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, pp. 109-57.

Butler J. (2003) Violence, Mourning, Politics. *Studies in Gender and Sexuality*. 4(1): 9– 37.

Butler J. (2010) *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable*. London: Verso.

Cantat C. (2015) Challenging borders, contesting Europeanism: 'Mediterranean solidarity' among pro-migrant groups in the EU. Presented at "L'espace au coeur des sciences sociales", organised by the lab TELEMME, Aix-Marseille University on 27 May 2015.

Catania R.T. (2015) Making immigrants visible in Lampedusa: Pope Francis, migration and the state. *Italian Studies* 70(4): 465-86.

Coleman M. And Grove K. (2009) Biopolitics, Biopower, and the Return of Sovereignty. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 27(3), 489-507.

Coleman M. (2007) Immigration Geopolitics Beyond the Mexico–US Border. *Antipode* 39(1), 54-76.

Council of Europe (2012), 'Lives lost in the Mediterranean Sea: who is responsible?'. 29 March 2012. [http://assembly.coe.int/CommitteeDocs/2012/20120329\\_mig\\_RPT.EN.pdf](http://assembly.coe.int/CommitteeDocs/2012/20120329_mig_RPT.EN.pdf)

Cuttitta P. (2016) From the *Cap Anamur* to *Mare Nostrum*: humanitarianism and migration controls at the EU's maritime borders. In C. Matera and A. Taylor (eds.) *The Common European Asylum System and Human Rights: Enhancing Protection in Times of Emergencies*. The Netherlands: CLEER, pp. 21-38.

de Haas H. (2013) Lampedusa: Only the dead can stay. 8 October 2013. <http://heindehaas.blogspot.com.tr/2013/10/lampedusa-only-dead-can-stay.html> (accessed 23.04.2016).

Délano Alonso A. and Nienass B. (forthcoming 2016) Deaths, Visibility and Responsibility: The Politics of Mourning at the US-Mexico Border. *Social Research, Special Issue: Borders and the Politics of Mourning* Summer 2016.

De León J. (2015) *The Land of Open Graves: Living and Dying on the Migrant Trail* (Oakland: University of California Press)

Della Mirandola P. (1486) *Oration on the Dignity of Man*. [https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/p/pico\\_della\\_mirandola/giovanni/dignity/](https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/p/pico_della_mirandola/giovanni/dignity/) (accessed 23.04.2016).

Doty R.L. (2011) Bare Life: Border-crossing Deaths and Spaces of Moral Alibi. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 29(4): 599-612.

Dunn T.J. (2010) *Blockading the Border and Human Rights: The El Paso Operation that Remade Immigration Enforcement*. Texas: University of Texas Press.

Estevez A. (2014) The politics of death and asylum discourse: Constituting migration politics from the periphery. *Alternatives*, 39(2): 75-89

Europol-INTERPOL (2016) Migrant Smuggling Networks. May 2016. <https://www.europol.europa.eu/content/europol-and-interpol-issue-comprehensive-review-migrant-smuggling-networks> (accessed 05.07.2016).

Foucault M. (1997) *Society must be Defended*. Penguin: London. (Trans. David Macey).

Galtung, J. (1969) Violence, peace and peace research. *Journal of Peace Research*, 6(3), 167-91.

Heller C and Pezzani L. (2012) Forensic Oceanography: *Left-To-Die* Boat Case <http://migrantsatsea.files.wordpress.com/2012/04/forensic-oceanography-report-11april20121.pdf> (accessed on 10 June 2013).

Heller C and Pezzani L. (2013) A Disobedient Gaze: Strategic Interventions in the Knowledge(s) of Maritime Borders. *Postcolonial Studies*, 16(3), 289-298.

- Kovras, I. and Robins, S. (2016) Death as Border: Managing Missing Migrant and Unidentified Bodies at the EU's Mediterranean Frontier. *Political Geography* 55, 40-49.
- Mbembe A. (2003) Necropolitics. *Public Culture*, 15(1), 11-40.
- McCrudden C. (2008) Human dignity and judicial interpretation of human rights. *European Journal of International Law* 19(4): 655-724.
- McDaniel A. (2010a) CSI Desert: When migrants die, who IDs them. *Mother Jones*, September/October issue, <http://m.motherjones.com/politics/2010/09/juan-doe-migrants-die-forensics-matt-nager> (accessed on 23.04.2016).
- McDaniel A. (2010b) The Juan Doe problem: One woman's search for dead migrants' roots. *Mother Jones*, September/October issue <http://m.motherjones.com/politics/2010/09/juan-doe-migrants-die-forensics-matt-nager> (accessed on 23.04.2016).
- McNevin A. (2013) Ambivalence and citizenship: Theorising the political claims of irregular migrants. *Millennium* 41(2): 182-200.
- Muller, B. (2012) Borderworld: Biometrics, AVATAR and Global Criminalisation. In Francis Pakes (ed.) *Globalisation and the Challenge to Criminology*. London: Routledge, pp. 129-145.
- Nevins J. (2010) *Operation Gatekeeper and Beyond: The War on Illegals and the Re-making of the US-Mexico Boundary*. London: Routledge.
- Pallister-Wilkins P. (2015a) The humanitarian policing of 'our sea'. <http://bordercriminologies.law.ox.ac.uk/humanitarian-policing-of-our-sea/> (accessed on 23.04.2016).
- Pallister-Wilkins P. (2015b) The Humanitarian Politics of European Border Policing: Frontex and Border Police in Evros. *International Political Sociology* 9(1): 53-69.
- Robins S. et al (2014) Addressing migrant bodies on Europe's southern border: An agenda for research. June 2014 Policy Brief <http://www.simonrobins.com/Policy%20brief%20-%20Addressing%20migrant%20bodies%20in%20the%20EU.pdf> (accessed on 23.04.2016).
- Robins S. and Kovras I. (2015) The families of missing migrants and refugees may never know their fates. *The Conversation*, 1 October 2015, <https://theconversation.com/the-families-of-missing-migrants-and-refugees-may-never-know-their-fates-48396> (accessed on 23.04.2016).
- Rosen, M. (2012) *Dignity: Its History and Meaning*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Rygiel K. (2010) *Globalizing Citizenship*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press.
- Rygiel, K. (2014) In Life Through Death: Transgressive Citizenship at the Border. In E. F. Isin and P. Nyers (eds.). *Routledge Handbook of Global Citizenship Studies*. New York and London: Routledge, pp. 62-72.

Rygiel K. (2016 forthcoming) Dying to live: Migrant deaths and citizenship politics along European borders: Transgressions, disruptions and mobilizations. *Citizenship Studies* (August 2016).

Squire, V. (2016) 12 days in Lampedusa: The potential and perils of a photo essay. FocaalBlog, 11 January, <http://www.focaalblog.com/2016/01/11/vicki-squire-12-days-in-lampedusa-the-potential-and-perils-of-a-photo-essay/#sthash.H8u1JUym.dpuf>

Squire, V. (2015a) *Post/humanitarian Border Politics Between Mexico and the US: People, Places, Things*. Basingstoke: Palgrave-Macmillan.

Squire, V. (2015b) Acts of desertion: The ambiguities of abandonment and renouncement across the Sonoran borderzone. *Antipode* 47(2), 500-516.

Squire, V. (Ed.) (2011) *The Contested Politics of Mobility: Borderzones and Irregularity*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Squire, V. (2014) Desert 'trash': Posthumanism, border struggles, and humanitarian politics. *Political Geography* 39, 11-21.

Stierl M. (2016) Contestations in death – the role of grief in migration struggles. *Citizenship Studies* 20(2): 173-191.

Sundberg J. (2008). 'Trash talk and the Production of Quotidian Geopolitical Boundaries in the United States-Mexico Borderlands. *Social and Cultural Geography* 9(8), 871-890.

Topak O. (2014) The biopolitical border in practice: Surveillance and death at the Greek-Turkey borderzone, *Society and Space* 32: 815-833.

Urrera L.A. (2004) *The Devil's Highway: A True Story*. New York: Little, Brown and Company.

Vaughan-Williams N. (2012) *Border Politics: The Limits of Sovereign Power* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press).

Vaughan-Williams N. (2015a) *Europe's Border Crisis: Biopolitical Security and Beyond*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Vaughan-Williams N. (2015b) We are *not* animals!" Humanitarian border security and zoopolitical spaces in Europe. *Political Geography* 45: 1-10

Williams J. (2015) From humanitarian exceptionalism to contingent care: Care and enforcement at the border. *Political Geography* 47: 11-20.

Zagaria, V. (2011) Grave Situations. Unpublished MA dissertation.

XXXX (2011)

XXXX (2014)

XXXX (2015a)

XXXX (2015b)

XXXX (2016)

XXXX et al (2016)

---

<sup>1</sup> Many thanks to the editorial team and the two anonymous referees for insightful comments on early drafts of this article. This article was presented at International Studies Association Annual Conference in Atlanta, USA, 16-20 March 2016. Thanks are extended to the audience, panelists and in particular to the discussant Dr Philippe Frowd. Research for this article has been funded by a Leverhulme Research Fellowship RF-2015-545, *Human dignity and biophysical violence: Migrant deaths across the Mediterranean Sea*, and by an Open University Research Development Fund grant, *Desert(ed) Trash: Border Struggles at the US-Mexico Border*.

<sup>2</sup> US Border Patrol Statistics, "Southwest border deaths by fiscal year"  
<https://www.cbp.gov/sites/default/files/documents/BP%20Southwest%20Border%20Sector%20Deaths%20FY1998%20-%20FY2015.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Last, T. and Spijkerboer, S. (2010) "Tracking deaths in the Mediterranean", in *Fatal Journeys: Tracking Lives lost During Migration* pp.85-108,  
[https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/fataljourneys\\_countingtheuncounted.pdf](https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/fataljourneys_countingtheuncounted.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> <http://missingmigrants.iom.int/mediterranean> Notable is that in both contexts many deaths are not noted because bodies are lost and decompose and therefore are not always counted (e.g. see Delano and Nienass, 2016).

<sup>5</sup> Two fieldwork trips were carried out in 2011 and 2012 in the US, and two fieldwork trips was carried out to Sicily and Lampedusa in 2015. The article here is primarily conceptual and does not discuss fieldwork in full details. For further information, please see XXXX (2015b) and XXXX et al (2016).

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.forensic-architecture.org/case/left-die-boat/>

<sup>7</sup> <http://missingmigrants.iom.int/mediterranean>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/news/nr/aylan-kurdi-social-media-report-1.533951>

<sup>9</sup> This is not dissimilar to the argument that sovereign violence as self-erasing (Bargu cited in Bieberstein and Evren, 2016).

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/Channel4News/videos/10153484965031939/>

<sup>11</sup> Interview carried out in October 2015

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-24388523>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.ewtnnews.com/catholic-news/Vatican.php?id=13117>